

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

Mr. Kowalsky: — Good morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to ask leave of the House that we would now proceed directly to motions for return (debatable).

Leave granted.

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Debatable)

Return No. 1

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This particular item has mainly been dealt with because it deals with the sale of Wascana Energy either to Talisman, which is what the question was about, or to any other entity.

With the sale to CanOxy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue has been basically resolved, although we still feel it would be important to have gained this information to understand just what role the government had played in the sale of Wascana Energy and the sale of the government shares when they offered them onto the market.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I would move the return, that an order of the Assembly do issue a return showing:

To the minister responsible for CIC: (1) the details of any meetings taking place between the officials of Talisman Energy and cabinet ministers, Crown Investment officials, and/or any other government officials prior to February 13, 1997, at which the possible take-over of Wascana Energy was discussed; (2) the dates and locations of any such meetings; (3) whether any telephone and/or conference calls regarding the take-over of Wascana Energy took place prior to February 13 between any representatives of government and Talisman Energy; (4) provide a list of all individuals in attendance at any such meetings; (5) whether there were any written minutes, briefings, and/or notes taken at any such meetings pertaining to Talisman's attempted take-over of Wascana Energy; and (6) the names of any cabinet ministers or other government officials who indicated support for the Talisman proposal at any such meetings and/or whether they considered Talisman's proposed bid of \$18.50 per share to be a fair price, and if so, the cabinet ministers or other government officials that provided Talisman with these comments.

I so move, Mr. Deputy Speaker, seconded by the member from Rosthern.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to make a couple of comments, Mr. Speaker, with respect to dealing with these motions for return, that it's the government's intention to go through these today and those . . . the majority of the motions that we have before us, we will accept the motions, vote on them, and we will be tabling the responses directly.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that this is I think, in my memory, only the . . . my tenure sitting in this legislature, only the second time that this has been done. We set up this process last year where we were able to provide the motions for return immediately. I believe this process is far superior than what was done in the past. I recall sitting in opposition benches, moving these motions, and then waiting up to 150 days for the responses to occur. So I just wanted to provide you with this information.

There will be some motions that we will be amending, and of course there will be some motions that we'll be recommending defeat of because of inability . . . or perhaps jurisdictional reasons.

And what I want to do then for this motion no. 1 is to recommend that it be passed, and upon passing of this motion, I will submit the return.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 2

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 2 showing:

That the Minister of Northern Affairs, during the 1992-93 fiscal year, the amount of revenues the government collected from northern Saskatchewan from the following sources: (1) mining; (2) forestry; (3) tourism; (4) personal income tax; (5) corporate income tax; and (6) fuel tax.

I so present.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it comes to motion no. 2 and also 3 and 4 and 5, the questions that are being asked for . . . the answers that are being asked for are things that are not broken down ordinarily . . . or not broken down by region by the Government of Saskatchewan.

Furthermore, a lot of this information that is requested . . . or some of the information as requested requires some federal government input and is not broken down by them either, by regional basis.

Therefore, any response that would be given to a question like this one would require a great deal of estimation, perhaps even an arbitrary determination. It's our feeling that the value of such an answer would really be questionable and its accuracy could be questionable. So I therefore request the members to defeat this motion.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 3

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 3 showing:

To the Minister of Northern Affairs: during the 1993-94 fiscal year the amount of revenues the government collected from northern Saskatchewan from the following sources: (1) mining; (2) forestry; (3) tourism; (4) personal income tax; (5) corporate income tax; and (6) fuel tax.

Mr. Kowalsky: — I once again, for reasons I stated for the previous motion, I recommend defeat of this motion.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 4

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 4:

To the minister of Northern Affairs: during the 1994-95 fiscal year the amount of revenues the government collected from northern Saskatchewan from the following sources: (1) mining; (2) forestry; (3) tourism; (4) personal income tax; (5) corporate income tax; (6) fuel tax.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again I want to mention that records of this nature are not kept on a regional basis. I request the Assembly to defeat this motion.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 5

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think the important thing I want to add before I move the final motion on item no. 5 is often throughout the discussions and consultation over the past few years, there has been always a statement made by the Hon. Minister of Northern Affairs in essence at times it seems congratulating the government for spending more dollars than what it puts in northern Saskatchewan.

And often the figure that he uses, for every dollar we take out of northern Saskatchewan, we put a dollar sixty back in. And a lot of it is discussions, and the points that he makes along the way just simply shows that his facts are not based on . . . or his points are not based on facts because the information that they don't have cannot support his argument in terms of what exactly he does collect off northern Saskatchewan.

So the challenge that I have to the Minister of Northern Affairs is, how could he make those statements that for every dollar they take out of the North they put a \$1.60 back in, when they can't answer these questions about what exactly they collect from northern Saskatchewan.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the point has been well made; the government hasn't got specific information and the Minister of Northern Affairs shouldn't be making specific references to what they actually collect and what they actually take out.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Belanger: — Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by

the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 5 showing:

To the Minister of Northern Affairs: during 1995-96 fiscal year the amount of revenues the government collected from northern Saskatchewan from the following sources: (1) mining; (2) forestry; (3) tourism; (4) personal income tax; (5) corporate income tax; and (6) fuel tax.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I should like to mention to the Assembly that when it comes to motions for return, the items that are asked for and the items that can be provided are ones of factual nature. When the members are questioned in estimates, the response that is given is just that — it's an estimate. So I want to just differentiate between those two processes for the members' edification.

Mr. Speaker, for the reason stated before, that records of this nature are not kept on a regional basis, I urge the Assembly to defeat this motion.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 7

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Once again when certain actions and moves and closures are made by the government in the interest of the economics, to save monies, it's not always known whether or not the moves do in fact result in any kind of savings. Therefore I move that an order of the Assembly do issue a return:

To the Minister responsible for the Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation: (1) the amount the government pays per month in rent for the Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management office at 117 Third Avenue West in Melville; (2) the amount that has been budgeted for the renovations at the Provincial Building in Melville for the relocation of the SERM office to the Provincial Building; (3) the amount the province currently budgets per year to hold Provincial Court in Melville.

Seconded by the hon. member from Canora-Pelly.

Mr. Kowalsky: — I recommend that we pass this motion, and upon passing this motion, I'll be pleased to table the answers to the questions.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 8

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can see that the Hon. Minister of Justice did in fact provide this information during estimates, and unless the return is prepared, I do not see the need of pressing this matter at this time. The Minister of Justice did in fact address it in estimates. It may be dropped, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: — Item 7 dropped.

Return No. 9

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this case the Minister of Justice was questioned on this in estimates but did not provide an answer.

I know the Minister of Justice said that this would be difficult to provide an answer, but if I may say, I would be even satisfied with representative institutions, say the Regina provincial correctional centre. The food budget divided by the average daily census, I submit that that should not be difficult for the Justice department to provide. I think it can be done easily. It's not complicated.

And therefore I would move, seconded by the hon. member for Humboldt, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 9 showing:

The average food service budget per inmate per day for inmates in custody in Saskatchewan's provincial correctional institutions in 1996.

Mr. Kowalsky: — I appreciate the member's remarks and member's comments, Mr. Speaker, and we will be providing an answer with respect to a representative facility, as Regina. But in order to do so, I will be making an amendment to the existing motion, an amendment which reads, and I move:

That return (no. 9) be amended by deleting the words after "food" and the following substituted therefor:

cost per inmate per day for inmates in custody in the Regina Correctional Centre for the fiscal years of 1995-96 and 1996-97.

Seconded by the member from Lloydminster.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to mention that I have . . . I will be pleased to table the answer to the question upon passing of this motion.

Motion as amended agreed to.

Return No. 10

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I recognize that the Hon. Minister of Justice did certainly try to answer questions 9 through 12 in general in estimates. However I would still appreciate receiving the exact figures. He certainly answered them in general but didn't have the exact figures at his fingertips at the time.

So I will move, seconded by the hon. member for Humboldt, that an order of this Assembly do issue for a return no. 10 showing:

To the Minister of Justice: the number of sentencing circles that were held in Saskatchewan in 1996 and where they were held.

The Deputy Speaker: — I would ask the member who seconded the motion.

Mr. Hillson: — The member for Humboldt.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Upon passing this motion I'll be very pleased to give the member from North Battleford the very exact figures that he is looking for.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 11

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you. I move, seconded by the hon. member for Humboldt, that an order of this Assembly do issue for return no. 11 showing:

To the Minister of Justice: the number of sentencing circles that were held in Saskatchewan in 1995 and where they were held.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Once again, Mr. Speaker, I'll be pleased to provide the response; although I want to mention that in this case the response, the information, is not available exactly at this time but we've made a commitment to provide it as soon as it is available.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 12

Mr. Hillson: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the hon. member for Humboldt, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 12 showing:

To the Minister of Justice: the number of sentencing circles that were held in Saskatchewan in 1994 and where they were held.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 13

Mr. Hillson: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 13 showing:

To the Minister of Justice: the number of sentencing circles that were held in Saskatchewan in 1993 and where they were held.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 14

Mr. Heppner: — I still wonder why the government refuses to give the specifics to where these wooden penises now call home. I guess it's just a good example of what good sales people we are over here. When the PC (Progressive Conservative) caucus brought up the wooden penis fiasco, boom, they're all sold. Then we help the NDP sell hundreds of perogies, and I'm sure the phone lines are now lighting up to

stock up on Avon.

I move that an order of the Assembly do issue for return:

To the Minister of Education, regarding the 1,000 wooden penises purchased by the Education Department: (1) please provide a list of any provincial government departments and/or organizations outside Saskatchewan that have purchased wooden demonstrators from Saskatchewan's Education department; (2) the "household name" firm that purchased the wooden demonstrators from Saskatchewan's Education department; (3) please provide a list of Saskatchewan schools and health districts that purchased 46 wooden demonstrators.

I so move, seconded by the member from Cannington.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The member opposite has asked for a list of departments and agencies who have purchased wooden demonstrators from Saskatchewan Education, and he has differentiated between in- and out-of-province purchases. Now this issue, I believe, is one that has been the subject of a great deal of what I would call inappropriate humour, despite the seriousness of the subject, particularly on the part of the people who are trying to do some good about the subject.

We don't believe that there should be . . . is any good served by subjecting individual agencies who are approaching the subject responsibly, to further instances of inappropriate humour. Therefore we are amending the motion to provide a breakdown of in- and out-of-province purchasers by number only.

I therefore move, seconded by the member from Lloydminster:

That the motion for return (no. 14) be amended by deleting all the words after "Department" and the following substituted therefor:

- (1) provide the number that has been provided to organizations or institutions outside of Saskatchewan;
- (2) provide the number that has been provided to organizations or institutions within Saskatchewan.

And upon passing of this amendment and the motion, I would be pleased to present the Assembly with the answer to these questions.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

Return No. 15

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One of the reasons why we're asking the questions in reference to item no. 15 really deals with the expense of well over \$7.7 million in terms of out of court settlements in reference to Saskatchewan Energy and Mines. And there's no specific information as to why that figure is so high and what the value of or the reason for all the lawsuits. So in essence, that's one of the reasons why

we posed these questions.

I move, seconded by the hon. member of North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 15 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Energy and Mines: in the 1995-1996 annual report for Saskatchewan Energy and Mines, page 32, under petroleum and natural gas, the listed expenditures are \$11,378,907; included in this amount is an expense of \$7.714 million in out of court settlements to resolve lawsuits against the Crown: (1) the individual amounts for each of these settlements is required; (2) the recipients of these settlements; (3) the circumstances involved in each of these settlements; (4) whether there are any lawsuits still pending against the Crown with regard to Saskatchewan Energy and Mines; (5) the amounts of the out of court settlements that have been settled since the end of the 1995-96 fiscal year.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Once again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to mention that the departments have been very diligent and supplied us with the responses, and I will be pleased to table these responses as soon as this motion is voted.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 16

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 16:

To the minister responsible for Sask Energy and Mines: (1) the amounts of settlements of any lawsuits against the Crown with regard to Sask Energy and Mines in the year 1992-93; (2) the recipients of these settlements; (3) the circumstances involved in each of these settlements.

Thank you.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Once again, Mr. Speaker, I recommend that we pass this motion and we'll be tabling the response immediately after the motion is passed.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 17

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe the intent of the questions here is to really see exactly how much over a period of years that Sask Energy and Mines has been paying out in out of court settlements. These figures could be very substantial and we want to rest assured . . . have the taxpayers feel assured that these dollars certainly aren't continual and they aren't simply here to cover matters up.

So I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 17 showing:

To the minister responsible for Sask Energy and Mines: (1)

the amounts of the settlements of any lawsuits against the Crown with regard to Sask Energy and Mines in the year 1993-94; (2) the recipients of these settlements; (3) the circumstances involved in each of these settlements.

I so present.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the spirit of open, accountable, and responsible government, I would be pleased to table a response upon passage of this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 18

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Again we're doing this for every year because, you know, we have to find this information out as quickly as we can. Therefore I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 18 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Energy and Mines: (1) the amount of the settlements of any lawsuits against the Crown with regard to Sask Energy and Mines in the year 1994-95; (2) the recipients of these settlements; (3) the circumstances involved in each of these settlements.

Thank you.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 19

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm a little surprised that the government has been reluctant to table the answers to this question to date. The information should be readily available from the department regarding, of course, the 1996-97 district . . . health district budgets. As well as they should have a handle on the '97-98 amounts that they're going to be giving to the health districts.

However, if the government is intending on doing as they did last year and pumping some emergency money into the health care system, Mr. Speaker, in particular the health districts, then they can simply table the figures to date and provide additional the figures as they deem necessary. So I'm a little surprised that the government is not being very open and accountable in regards to something as important to health care in this province.

Therefore I move, seconded by the member from Melfort, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 19 showing:

To the Minister of Health: (1) the total funding from the Department of Health to each individual health district for the 1997-98 fiscal year; (2) the percentage funding increase provided to each individual Saskatchewan health district in 1997-1998 compared to a total funding provided

to districts in 1996-97 which included a \$40 million emergency payment to districts.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The orders for return, as I mentioned earlier, are items that should be asking for factual information. This question asks an estimate for the current year and it asks for a comparison with that estimate. Those questions should properly be . . . have been put to the Committee of Finance to the Minister of Health. Therefore I ask the Assembly to defeat this motion.

Motion negated.

Return No. 21

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think the important thrust in trying to get reference to the request for information on no. 21 is the fact that northern Saskatchewan and the people living in northern Saskatchewan have the unusual high rates of cancer, heart disease, and TB (tuberculosis) and other serious illnesses.

And this fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is also complicated with the lack of adequate water and sewer in many northern communities. And certainly the housing problem, the isolation, all these add to tremendous challenges for the northern Saskatchewan community and the people there as well.

And secondly, with the influx of modern life in the last 50, 60 years, their diet has changed. And that also affects their health in many ways, shapes, and form. And most recently, transferring wild meat which people used to eat in the previous years to more domesticated meat such as cattle and pork and so on, we're also seeing this also attributes to many health challenges for northern Saskatchewan people.

So the gist and the thrust of this question is really to determine what the government is doing to react to these unusually high rates that are caused by housing problems, by isolation, by the change of diet. And what we do not want to see is we do not want to see any effort to diminish these problems and we want to make sure that the government is staying on top of the problem, especially of TB and other assorted illnesses.

So this is the gist of the questions and we're making sure the government is realizing the health challenges are associated to a variety of causes. We've identified housing and overcrowding of housing as one of them, the lack of water and sewer as another one of them, and that list of course, goes on.

However, to be sure that the provincial meat inspection is not the case or cause of TB, we want to make sure that these things and these sites are properly inspected.

So therefore I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 21 showing:

To the minister responsible for Northern Affairs: (1) the number of provincial meat inspectors that work in and for northern Saskatchewan; (2) the names and locations of

these inspectors; (3) whether the number of northern provincial meat inspectors has increased or decreased over the past year; (4) whether there has been any reports of an increase in the number of tuberculosis cases in northern Saskatchewan; (5) whether there is any evidence that the decrease in provincial meat inspectors is related to the increased number of TB cases in the North; (6) what is the government doing to address these problems?

I so present.

Mr. Kowalsky: — I will be pleased to table a response to the member's question. But I do want to mention to the member that the answer he's going to be getting will supply the number of cases of tuberculosis in the northern administration district.

But the portion of the question respecting meat inspectors, maybe we'll have to turn to his federal cousins for their answers to that, because those are actually federal meat inspectors.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 22

Ms. Julé: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I posed this question because there are a number of communities and health districts in the province that are waiting for the government to give some assurance that funding will be provided for capital projects that have been in fact promised by this government or through their ministry in some fashion.

They have been assured of facilities that will meet their needs, and it's impossible for these people in our health districts to understand whether the assurances given by government are in fact going to come about if they do not have some notification of approval for the capital project funding in a pertinent time so that they may begin to plan around those funds.

And so I move, seconded by the hon. member from Arm River, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 22 showing:

To the Minister of Health: (1) the health facility capital projects that have been approved by the Department of Health since April 1, 1996; (2) the health facility capital projects that have been submitted to the Department of Health for approval and are currently awaiting such approval from the department; (3) of those health facility capital projects currently awaiting approval by the Department of Health, the dates that they were submitted to the department for such approval.

I so present.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to mention, that is a very good question and I have some very good answers for that question. And all the facts will be supplied upon passage of this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 23

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the questions posed — the next seven questions — have to do with the amount of projects contracted under the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement in the various Crowns that are signatories to the agreement. I do understand that if the government needs to, is to change from the calendar year that the question was asked in, to change for the fiscal year '96-97, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that would be acceptable. Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Arm River, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 23 showing:

To the minister responsible of Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation: the total value of construction projects which Saskatchewan Forest Products Corporation will undertake during 1997 coming within the scope of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will say with respect to item no. 23 applies also to 24, 25, 26, and 27. All of these motions for return request information about the total value of construction projects that will be undertaken into the future.

I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, that orders for return can be supplied when we can supply actual factual information. This question deals with contracts which have not yet been set or let.

The Crown corporations, by tradition, report the financial results of their year after the year closes and do not present advance budgets, as do departments and agencies. And I believe that anybody that's been in business could understand the reasons for that, because the contracts have not been yet set and it may well interfere with the bidding processes.

Therefore I ask that the Assembly defeat this motion, as well as I will be asking the same thing for the next four motions.

Motion negated.

Return No. 24

Mr. Gantefoer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Arm River, to move for an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 24 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Government Insurance: the total value of construction projects which Saskatchewan Government Insurance will undertake during 1997 coming within the scope of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Motion negated.

Return No. 25

Mr. Gantefoer: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Arm River, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 25 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Transportation Company: the total value of construction projects which Saskatchewan Transportation Company will undertake during 1997 coming within the scope of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 26

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Arm River, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 26 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Power Corporation: the total value of construction projects which Saskatchewan Power Corporation will undertake during 1997 coming within the scope of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 27

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the hon. member from Arm River, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 27 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Water Corporation: the total value of construction projects which Saskatchewan Water Corporation will undertake during 1997 coming within the scope of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 28

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the hon. member from Arm River, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 28 showing:

To the minister responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated: the total value of construction projects which SaskEnergy Incorporated will undertake during 1997 coming within the scope of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 29

Mr. Gantefer: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move, seconded by the hon. member from Arm River, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 29 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Telecommunications: the total value of construction projects which Saskatchewan Telecommunications will undertake during 1997 coming within the scope of the Crown Construction Tendering Agreement.

Motion negatived.

Return No. 30

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think again the thrust of this question no. 30 is really to deal with housing in northern Saskatchewan, another great area of concern as I've expounded in this Assembly on a number of occasions. And particularly the whole thrust of this question is to talk about removing the disincentives associated with the social housing programs in northern Saskatchewan.

And we have been calling for years and years, and once again calling for the government to come up with an innovative, exciting, and dynamic approach to housing in northern Saskatchewan, a housing package that would encourage people to work, would encourage couples to own their own homes, to establish the true market value of some of these homes. And all these questions that have been asked and presented to governments and basically have fell on deaf ears.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, housing, as I've mentioned time and time again, is the number one problem in northern Saskatchewan, from the lack of housing to the lack of repair programs for older people, for young families; to lack of a system which encourages people to go to work and to promote home ownership; to the lack of a study to determine the true market value of some of these homes — all these questions are out there and basically nothing has happened. Absolutely nothing. And I challenge the government to begin to address some of these problems if you really, truly do care about the North.

So therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 30 showing:

To the minister responsible for Municipal Government: (1) the interest rate you are charging on northern mortgages; (2) the ratio of mortgage payments assessed versus the actual mortgage payments received; (3) the number of current mortgages that are with working families; (4) the number of families who are in payment arrears and the average outstanding amount; (5) the arrangement between the province and the federal government and the terms of reference to past social housing agreements, specifically mortgage arrangements.

I so present.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We will be tabling a response to this question, but I will want to make an amendment in order that the question provide accurate information that the member is actually seeking.

With respect to the housing that is subsidized by the provincial and federal governments, the owners of the home, or the residents, do not actually pay a mortgage. They actually pay 25 per cent of their household income. And then the difference between these payments and the actual mortgage payments is made up by the government . . . respective governments.

We will also be amending portion no. (3) . . . or deleting portion no. (3) of his question which asks about the number of current mortgages with working families. And the reason is because these records are not kept by employment status.

And we will be deleting no. (4) which asks the number of families that are in payment arrears and the average outstanding amount. These records are not kept in any statistical manner and the cost of answering this would very, very high. We'd have to go through every folder, individual portfolio, for every member that was . . . or every household owner.

Therefore I move, seconded by the member from Lloydminster, the following amendment:

That motion for return no. 30 be amended by:

deleting all the words in section (2) after "payments" and the following substituted therefor:

"made by mortgage clients in the North to payments received;" and

deleting sections (3) and (4); and

renumbering section (5) to section (3).

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

Return No. 31

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I guess to summarize some of the questions that we're trying to make points here in terms of northern Saskatchewan problems. We've talked about health care; we've talked about some of the challenges of community health; about the isolation factors; about employment; we've spoken about housing.

And certainly now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would not be complete in terms of some of the questions we have . . . the specific questions we need to have answered is on road construction.

Road construction in northern Saskatchewan remains to be one of the biggest challenges for many northern communities. We've spoken about thousands of people that are isolated during the critical months before winter freeze-up and certainly during the spring thaw, and the fact that it seems that highways are receiving less and less and less priority in northern Saskatchewan. And this is just totally unacceptable.

It seems the budgets and the efforts to maintain northern roads have just been driven into the ground. And that again is an indication of a commitment of this government to northern highways.

I think one of the reasons why we want to have these questions asked in terms of a statement made by the Minister of Northern Affairs in which he identified \$5 million going into northern

Saskatchewan, of which 4 million would be going into my constituency, we wanted to get the affirmation in terms of where exactly these dollars were being spent and certainly who was spending these dollars.

It is our contention that between the Indian bands, between the corporations that have contributed to a number of funding agreements with the province to maintain roads where mines and forestry activities are happening, that they also contribute a great share of the northern road budget. And as well we have Indian bands that also contribute, and training dollars that are also used for road construction.

So we're trying to prove with questions of this nature, the one point is where exactly is the money coming from. And what we hope to prove is that between the federal government, the Indian bands, and the companies operating in northern Saskatchewan, that they have indeed outspent the province in that regard.

(1100)

And secondly, we also want to point out that highways continues to be a main problem in northern Saskatchewan, and we cannot stress that enough. Time will not allow me to do that.

And third, to call for a comprehensive long-term strategy for highways. And when they make statements in this House of X amount of million dollars, you can almost guarantee that we'll put them to task to confirm where these dollars are coming from and to ensure that these figures are substantiated by who's putting what in.

So as a result, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure that I move, seconded by the hon. member from North Battleford, that an order of the Assembly for a return no. 31 showing:

To the Minister responsible for Highways and Transportation: (1) the financial breakdown in terms of (a) location and (b) type of project for the \$5 million the government allocated to northern highways (for example, the amount of money that will be spent on roads and the amount on bridges, furthermore, the location of these roads and bridges); (2) the proportion of the money allocated to northern highways that was collected from the following sources: (please break down accordingly) the forestry industry, the mining industry, Indian bands, the federal government, community contribution; (3) the amount of money that was allocated for specific training programs to the above projects from the following sources: Metis Pathways, the forestry industry, the mining industry, Indian bands, the federal government, community contribution; (4) of the total expenditures on highways in the North, the proportion that is allocated for the primary purpose of extracting resources from the North; and by primary purpose we are referring to those roads with a higher rate of use by heavy-haul vehicles other than civilian traffic.

I so present.

Mr. Kowalsky: — What's obvious, Mr. Speaker, is that the member doesn't want to know about the highway projects in northern Saskatchewan. However, the wording of the sections (1) and (2) are unclear. Therefore before providing the information, I would like to move an amendment, following which we'll be providing the information.

I move, seconded by the member from Lloydminster:

That the motion for return no. 31 be amended by

deleting all the words in section (1) and the following substituted therefor:

the capital highways projects in northern Saskatchewan funded by the province that are to be undertaken by the department during the 1997-98 fiscal year. Project details including: location of work, type of work, and estimated 1997-98 costs are to be provided; and

deleting all the words in section (2) and the following substituted therefor:

the capital highway projects in northern Saskatchewan that are to be undertaken by the department during the 1997-98 fiscal year with funding provided through other sources (i.e., federal government, industry, Indian bands, communities, etc.). Project details including: location of work, type of work, estimated 1997-98 costs and source of funding are to be provided.

I so move.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Aldridge: — With leave, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to introduce guests.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Mr. Aldridge: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To you and through you to everyone assembled here this morning, I'd like to introduce a group of 40 students, grades 9 through 12, sitting in your gallery, accompanied by their teachers Mike Hubick and Guy Genest as well as chaperon Valerie Burton.

I understand that half of these students are from my riding, from Vanguard School, and the other half are from the province of Quebec. So I would just like everybody here this morning to give them a warm welcome to our Assembly, and I hope you enjoy the balance of your day's travels.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: — Why is the member on his feet?

Mr. Belanger: — With leave, to introduce a guest.

Leave granted.

Mr. Belanger: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To you and through you I want to introduce a very special guest that travelled many miles to be here with us here today. He's sitting in the Speaker's gallery.

I'm not sure where I could say he's from. I know he was . . . he's from Green Lake and he eats near Silver Lake where his mother's house is. And he lives in Beauval and he works on the highway. So really, I really can't say where exactly he's from.

But I'd like the Assembly to welcome Merlin Morin to the Assembly today. And I've had the distinct pleasure of being his first cousin. And him being a trucker and an athlete and a great, popular man, it's really nice to be associated with him. So I'd ask the Assembly to please welcome Mr. Morin to the Assembly.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

MOTIONS FOR RETURNS (Debatable)

Return No. 32

Mr. Kowalsky: — I would be prepared to give leave to the member sitting who may want to move this motion on behalf of Mr. D'Autremont.

The Deputy Speaker: — The Government Whip has requested leave that the motion be moved by another member. I must also state that the member must have a seconder for the motion in the Assembly.

Leave granted.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I move that an order of the Assembly do issue for return showing:

To the Minister of Finance: (1) whether any government-run pension plans invested in Bre-X in '95-96 fiscal year; (2) if the answer to no. 1 is yes, list the pensions which invested in Bre-X, the number of shares that were purchased and the price, whether the Bre-X shares were sold, and the selling price.

And I so move, seconded by the member from Saltcoats.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I will be pleased to table a response upon passage of this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 33

Mr. Kowalsky: — Again for this motion, or any other motion that may come, I would ask the Assembly to give leave to any member moving the motion for the member who has submitted the motion.

Leave granted.

Mr. Heppner: — Thank you. I move an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing:

To the Minister of Finance: (1) whether any government-run pension plans invested in Bre-X in '96-97 fiscal year, and if the answer to no. 1 is yes, list the pensions which invested in Bre-X, the number of shares that were purchased and the price, and whether Bre-X shares sold, and the selling price.

I so move, seconded by the member from Saltcoats.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, providing a long list of when shares were bought and sold and at what price, as the member requested, is sort of a cumbersome way of inquiring about any losses incurred. Therefore I will be proposing an amendment to that section in order to provide a clear and direct answer.

I move, seconded by the member from Lloydminster:

That the motion for return no. 33 be amended by deleting all the words in section (2) after "yes" and the following substituted therefor:

list which pension plans invested in Bre-X and the losses incurred.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

Return No. 34

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 34 showing:

To the minister responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated: the lands that were expropriated by SaskEnergy Incorporated and its subsidiaries during the year 1991 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, I'll be pleased to table the response upon passage of this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 35

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 35 showing:

To the Minister responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated: the lands that were expropriated by SaskEnergy Incorporated and its subsidiaries during the year 1992 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Speaker, in the interest of open,

accountable, and responsible government, I will be pleased to table this response upon passage of this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 36

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 36 showing:

To the minister responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated: the lands that were expropriated by SaskEnergy Incorporated and its subsidiaries during the year 1993 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 37

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 37 showing:

To the minister responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated: the lands that were expropriated by SaskEnergy Incorporated and its subsidiaries during the year 1994 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

(1115)

Return No. 38

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 38 showing:

To the minister responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated: the lands that were expropriated by SaskEnergy Incorporated and its subsidiaries during the year 1995 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 39

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 39 showing:

To the minister responsible for SaskEnergy Incorporated: the lands that were expropriated by SaskEnergy Incorporated and its subsidiaries during the year 1996 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 40

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded

by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 40 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Water Corporation: the lands that were expropriated by Saskatchewan Water Corporation during the year 1991 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 41

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, since questions 39, 40, 41, 42, and 43 on the blues are all similar questions for different years, I was wondering if, by leave, if we could do them all simultaneously.

The Deputy Speaker: — I would advise the member that it is kind of impossible to do them by leave because they are separate questions to separate departments with separate answers. So I would recommend that we do them individually.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would note that the questions I asked for are all from the same department. But I'll rely on your wisdom and proceed.

I move, seconded by the member for Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 41 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Water Corporation: the lands that were expropriated by Saskatchewan Water Corporation during the year 1992 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 42

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 42 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Water Corporation: the lands that were expropriated by Saskatchewan Water Corporation during the year 1993 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 43

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 43 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Water Corporation: the lands that were expropriated by Saskatchewan Water Corporation during the year 1994 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 44

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 44 showing:

To the minister responsible for Sask Water Corporation: the lands that were expropriated by Sask Water Corporation during the year 1995 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 45

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 45 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Water Corporation: the lands that were expropriated by Sask Water Corporation during the year 1996 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 46

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 46 showing:

To the minister responsible for Sask Power Corporation: the lands that were expropriated by the Saskatchewan Power Corporation during the year 1991 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 47

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With leave, Mr. Speaker, for 45 to 50, which is returns to 52, to simply read the number of the order and the year.

Leave granted.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale to move an order of the Assembly to issue for return no. 47 for the year 1992.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 48

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 48 for the year 1993.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 49

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 49 for the year 1994.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 50

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 50 for the year 1995.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 51

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 51 for the year 1996.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 52

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 52 showing:

To the Minister responsible for SaskPower Corporation: the lands that have been expropriated or are presently subject to notices of intended expropriation by Saskatchewan Power Corporation for the construction of the Condie-Queen Elizabeth line and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 53

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 53 showing:

To the minister responsible for Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation: the lands that were expropriated by Saskatchewan Telecommunications Holding Corporation and its subsidiaries during the year 1991 and the names of the registered owners of such lands.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 54

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, with leave, to do 52, 3 and 4 and 5 with just the return and the year.

Leave granted.

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, that an order of the Assembly do issue for return no. 54 for the year 1992.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 55

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale to move that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 55 for year 1993.

Motion agreed to.

(1130)

Return No. 56

Mr. McLane: — Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the member from Melfort-Tisdale, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 56 for the year 1995.

Motion agreed to.

Return No. 57

Mr. McLane: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the member from Melville, that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return no. 57 for the year 1996.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Over the last hour and a half we have been working on these motions for return, and I think just the fact that it took us an hour and a half to get through voting the motions would give us a little bit of an indication of just how much work is required on the part of all of the employees — the public servants of this government, the employees who work not only in the city of Regina but those that work in other parts of the province — because they are called upon to supply the answers to these questions.

So I would at this time like, on behalf of all the member of the Assembly, to thank the employees of the government who were involved in securing the answers to these questions.

I would like to thank the host business office for assembling the questions for us and thank the members opposite for putting the questions in the interest of the general public.

And I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, before I sit down, that this is only the second time to my knowledge that a process like this has been followed by a government where the orders for a return have been supplied immediately. And I have been proud to do this on behalf of the government in the spirit of open, accountable, and responsible government.

Upon passage of this very last motion, it will be my pleasure to table the responses to even this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Kowalsky: — Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would request leave

of the House that we now revert back to government business.

Leave granted.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 68 — The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, 1997

The Chair: — I invite the minister to introduce her official.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On my left is Bill Werry, the executive director of the sport, recreation, and lotteries branch of Municipal Government.

Clause 1

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Madam Minister. And welcome to your officials.

The Bill No. 68, just a couple of questions about it. I wonder if the minister can tell us how much currently sits in the associated equity fund, please?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, in response to the question from the member opposite, in this year's estimates for '97-98, there is 2.4 million. There is a residual from last year, but we're not quite certain of the amount yet because we know the amount from the Regina casino, which is about 2 . . . just under \$300,000 for the associated entity share, but the first nations-run casinos have not completed their audit yet so we don't have that number for '96-97. Whatever that number is will be in addition to the numbers I've cited.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I take it then that you don't have the numbers and the amounts in the first nations fund as well, the separate fund?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, that's correct. Those are the statements where the audit is not yet complete.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you. Madam Minister, can you tell us what the exact date was that these funds were established? Do you have that information?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the legislation somewhat predates this and I had no involvement in that. But in, I think, August 1996, responsibility for only part III and part IV of the Act, which relates to the associated entities fund, was transferred to my responsibility and the numbers to be distributed appear in the budget for Municipal Government as of August last year.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Then by the same token, I expect that you would not have a specific amount that's been distributed thus far and to which groups or agencies, if any at all.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, aside from the first

nations fund, the associated entities fund has established a board of trustees who met on May 6 to deal with the issue of distribution based on the applications that were received. And those decisions are being made now and the groups whose application is successful will be notified shortly.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I take it then that this legislation that's before the House is to legalize the distribution — the collection and distribution of these funds. Am I correct in that assumption?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, that is correct. And those determinations are made at arm's length through the board of trustees of the associated entities fund. And what this legislation is doing, it was when we started to consider the distribution that Finance notified us that there was a flaw in the Act because it deals with the distribution of the Regina casino, but there is no legislative authority for distributing the proceeds from the first nations-run casinos, because at the time I think . . . well SIGA (Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority), as we call it, wasn't established yet when this legislation originated, and there were no profits. Because obviously there weren't any first nations-run casinos, there was no contemplation of how the profits would flow. So there's no authority for us to receive money from the first nations-run casinos and no authority to pay it out. And that's what the amendments here are correcting.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Madam Minister. I guess that was the concern that was raised, is why has it taken so long to bring this legislation in, when in fact this operation has been in place for several years, and why has it taken so long?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, it's because the . . . there were no native-, first nations-run casinos at the time this legislation was passed. And we didn't know this, because we had responsibility for only section 3 and 4, and it was when we started to contemplate the distribution that Finance notified us that the Bill was deficient in that respect and that we needed, in order to have the authority to pay it out, needed to make this amendment with reference to the first nations-run casinos.

Mr. Osika: — Thank you, Madam Minister. And thank you to your officials. And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 6 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

Bill No. 57 — The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On my left is John Edwards, who is the director of municipal policy and legislative services; behind me is Doug Morcom, manager of rural financial assistance; and beside him is Grete Nybraten, manager of urban financial assistance.

Clause 1

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair, and good morning, Madam Minister, and welcome to your officials. I'd like to just make a few comments to start with, Madam Minister, before I get into our line of questioning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Bill will enable the provincial government to bring their legislation into line with the 25 per cent funding cuts and to offset the removal of the \$8 million in health . . . hospital levies. And I might like to also add there, Mr. Deputy Chair, that the municipalities actually have gained nothing through this because it was removed on one hand and then taken out of the revenue-sharing pool on the other. So it was a no-win situation for them.

(1145)

This legislation strikes at the heart of the matter that we have been presenting on behalf of Saskatchewan communities and rural municipalities all session long. It speaks directly to the drastic underfunding many local governments are struggling to cope with. Several times we have stood in question period and many other times during speeches in this House, to tell the minister and the government members opposite just exactly what devastation their revenue-sharing cuts are having on services, facilities, and the way of life in smaller centres.

Many local administrators and local government members are frustrated with severe underfunding. They say they have cut services as much as possible and have no other alternative but to raise their mill rates. And as I have told the minister a number of times, four out of five municipalities will be raising their mill rates that have reported back to me so far.

So there we have it — the downloading handed down by the NDP government forces local property owners to shoulder more of the financial burden. In other words, they are balancing the budget on their backs.

Smaller communities are also trying to cope with dropping population bases and they fear that the higher property taxes will be a great disincentive to those who may be considering moving to their towns, villages, and hamlets.

According to notes we received from SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association), this Bill will legalize the decision of the provincial government to ignore the escalator index as a basis for adjusting the size of the grant pool to match the growth in four provincial tax bases.

This Bill also removes the requirement to pay an equalization grant to each urban municipality along with per capita and basic grants.

The cuts to municipal revenue-sharing are now more than three times as great as the percentage of decrease in federal transfers to Saskatchewan in 1997.

Madam Minister, I guess where I'd like to go back to today to start with is, and we touched on this, I believe it was yesterday or the day before, and I've been contacted by a number of municipalities that listened to the debate we had that day. And

we were touching on the revenue sharing, Madam Minister, for the future and that could be next year, the year after. And I think why they are concerned — I know why they are concerned — and why I am concerned is because to run an RM (rural municipality) or a town administration out there you have to have some stability in your funding.

And I think the question they're asking and I asked you the other day, and I don't think they were quite satisfied with your answer, and I . . . probably what I am asking you, Madam Minister, is maybe could you elaborate or expand on where you feel funding will be going in the following year and the year after even? I think they would be satisfied with some kind of direction that you could show them where we would be heading next year.

Will there be more cuts? Will the cuts stop? Will there be an increase in funding possibly? Where are we really heading, Madam Minister? And it's not just me that is asking today, but I think there are municipalities out there listening for the answer.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I first need to correct some inaccuracies in this statement that the member opposite has made. Particularly with respect to the removal of the public health, hospital, and social services levy.

The original intention was to offset the entire 17.6 million off the revenue pool. But in fact in the budget, the government did pick up \$5.1 million, which represented the social assistance levy and the public health levy.

And we also, at that time, put an end to the agreement which would have seen an escalator because then Saskatoon and Regina would have had to pay, starting January 1 of 1997, according to an agreement that they signed in 1994 that would have raised the public health levy from \$6 per capita to \$12 per capita. So they had anticipated that increased financial responsibility, but with the removal of the levies entirely that escalator didn't take place, saving those major centres, representing almost half the population of the province, saved them a lot of money.

And in effect we did take the other 12 million off the revenue-sharing pool, but it gives municipalities now permanently that tax room that they can use where they no longer have to remit the money collected by that 2 mill hospital levy and the public health levy to the province. So they do have that amount of room. If you offset that from the revenue-sharing cuts, in some cases municipalities are actually better off.

In terms of the escalator that you refer to in the revenue-sharing formula that was established in the '70s, that in effect has been inoperative since 1982. So our change in removing it from the legislation simply reflects the reality that has now existed for 15 years.

So as to the future, as always it will be part of our budget deliberations and we also have had throughout this process an important dialogue with the municipal organizations through

the municipal round table and through the discussions with respect to the memorandum of understanding that was entered into a year ago.

So we're working out solutions in the formula and in the funding at that level.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister, but I think we once again have to agree to disagree. When you removed the health levy — and I remember back when I was still a reeve of an RM, that we were asking for that for a few years — what in our wildest dream we didn't expect to have it removed on one side and then taken away on the other end.

I disagree with the minister when she says that they have the ability now to replace that with something else, because really all we were as municipalities was a collection agency for that 2 mills. That money, I believe was passed on, and correct me if I'm wrong, to either a health district or into the health system.

An Hon. Member: — It certainly wasn't used by RMs.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Exactly. It was not there for the RMs to use for themselves. Now having taken that away, and being we were only a collection agency to pass that money on, we gained nothing there.

But we definitely, as municipalities of all kinds, lost on the other side because the revenue-sharing pool was not only dropped by that amount . . . Because then you add the other funding cuts that came in, and we had talked about 25 per cent. And I think in many cases, Madam Minister, we all know that the 25 per cent was very, very low in reality when everyone got their numbers out there.

So I think I need . . . I'd like to have a comment on that, Madam Minister. Because I think we're coming from two different areas and we're kind of passing kind of a misconception out there as to what really happened.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Well, Mr. Chairman, there's certainly no confusion in my mind that there was an offset to the revenue-sharing pool. And yes, municipalities simply . . . it wasn't their revenue. They simply passed it through to the health system. But they now, without increasing taxes, they could continue to collect that amount and use it for their own purposes without their ratepayers seeing any net increase in what they're paying.

So it's \$17.6 million that was collected from local taxpayers province-wide for the three levies and passed through, which they now, without their ratepayers seeing an increase, have that tax room that they can collect and use for their own purposes. Because the government, in making this offset, has permanently removed that responsibility from local ratepayers.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Well I think we still disagree, Madam Minister, but I guess we can understand maybe where you're coming from. I guess yes, they can take that 2 mills, leave it on and put into somewhere else. But then never forgetting, and I know the municipalities, RMs, and the towns aren't forgetting,

that they are cut on the other hand.

So they already have had to raise their mill rates to offset the funding cuts that have gone on since '91, and they've been drastic in many cases. So to say that this has really helped them out, I don't think that 2 mills is a . . . is a very small drop in the bucket. And even though we disagree on the understanding of what you're saying.

Madam Minister, you also have removed general government costs from the recognized expenditures. Can you explain why this was taken out the administrative end of it?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, what we're trying to emphasize in the municipal organizations at the round table and in the MOU (memorandum of understanding) discussions agree with this, is that the goal of local governments is to provide to the greatest extent they can, high quality services to their ratepayers. So we have ceased to recognize administration costs and are recognizing the level of service provided instead — to cost share in that.

And so if two communities of equal population, if one of them spends more on administration, for example, which is no longer recognized, they would get less than the other community with similar population that emphasizes service delivery and spends a smaller percentage of their budget on administration.

Mr. Bjornerud: — Thank you, Madam Minister. Madam Minister, I'd just like to go back. Something just struck us on this side — that you said that you would take the credit for removing the 2 mill health levy. But then really what you are saying is, you would take the credit for removing that but when the RMs keep that 2 mill on to replace something else, that actually they are at fault. And there's where I think the problem comes in here, is that you're trying to look good on one hand and really blame the RMs for keeping it on on the other hand.

Madam Minister, some Saskatchewan communities are now paying more in provincial sales tax than they are actually receiving in grants from the province. And I kind of wonder here, because we pay GST (goods and services tax) and PST (provincial sales tax) on such things . . . take an RM, for an example, on graders or whatever their purchases are, or the cities or the towns, whatever they buy out there, they pay PST, GST.

But in the case of the GST, and because in some cases we're blaming the federal government all the time for their offloading, they return 57.14 per cent of that GST to the municipalities, if I'm right — and you can correct me if I'm wrong — but in the case of the PST, yes it went from nine to seven, which helped.

But, Madam Minister, maybe we're at the point now if we were going to go to zero funding — and I presume that's where we're heading the way . . . at the speed we're heading there — maybe it would be time to say to these municipalities, okay, we are downloading onto you, we have cut you drastically; we in turn will remove the PST from any purchases you make, whether it's a city, town, village, or RM. Would you comment

on that, Madam Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, I'm not trying to take credit for anything. What municipalities have been asking for for a long, long time is to have their municipal tax base reserved exclusively for municipal purposes and not to act as an agent to fund health and social assistance and public health. So we simply responded to a request they've been making so that the municipal tax base is now clean and anything that they raise is raised for their own purposes.

And in terms of the sales tax, I think the member opposite is on really thin ice, bearing in mind the broken promise of the federal government to get rid of the GST. And we have reduced the sales tax by 2 per cent in the last budget. We are now . . . have the lowest level of provincial sales tax of any province having such a tax.

We have the misfortune to live beside the one province that doesn't have a sales tax, but every other province has a sales tax at some level, and our level is the lowest in Canada. And if we start exempting municipalities from paying sales tax, if we start, then the education system would likely say, well this is a worthy cause; we shouldn't pay sales tax. Health system doesn't want to pay sales tax. Well who's left to pay the sales tax?

So we have some exemptions, limited exemptions. The answer of the federal Liberals is — your cousins in Ottawa — to harmonize. The biggest scam to . . . It's such a nice-sounding word. It's a huge transfer of tax from corporations and businesses who get refunds, to individuals.

And we're opposed to that. We want to continue to move the level of the provincial sales tax down within whatever ability we have to do that. And we have . . . we also have the narrowest tax base of any province in Canada in terms of the exemptions for children's clothing and restaurant meals and so forth.

Mr. Toth: — Mr. Chairman, just a comment in listening to the debate that's taking place in the Assembly today.

Madam Minister, as I've been trying to follow your reasons for removing the health levy and telling RMs that you've done such a good job — you've removed the health levy — but then in cutting more funding, you've basically taken more away from RMs. But you're asking . . . saying to them, well you do have the 2 mill health levy that used to be there that you were the collection agent for; you can now go and grab a hold of that and raise more funds.

The other concern, Madam Minister, and we talked of . . . the member from Saltcoats just talked about the provincial sales tax. And that's a major concern, especially when you look at the costs of equipment.

Madam Minister, I would suggest that you could do a lot for RMs, a lot for rural taxpayers, by, if you will — if you want them to generate their own revenue and provide for their own programing — take a hold of the educational portion of the

property tax, and fund education as a province should in the province of Saskatchewan. And I would almost guarantee that rural municipalities would certainly be able to generate the revenue they need and provide all the funding that is necessary without increasing taxes.

So as you've said you've done to the municipalities for health revenue — you've removed the 2 per cent levy — now absorb and take control of the property tax or the educational portion, fund education as you should be, by the province, rather than asking property taxpayers to continue to bury the load. Thank you, Madam Minister.

(1200)

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, the member opposite has heard the Premier; he's heard the Minister of Education; and he's heard myself say that we are studying that issue. And our goal is to fund education, as it's sustainable over a term, to a greater degree from the treasury to reduce the property tax burden on the local taxpayer. That's our goal.

And I need to . . . the member says that it's a no-win situation for municipalities; I say it's a no-lose situation for municipalities because there is an offset. We took it off revenue sharing but they no longer have to collect that exact same amount from their ratepayers to cover the costs of hospital, health, and social services that they always paid before. It's \$17.6 million of tax room at the local level.

So there is . . . and we're more generous in the offset because we didn't . . . we put back in the 5.1 million that covered the two levies and only reduced revenue sharing by the 12. So it's better than an offset.

Mr. Toth: — Madam Minister, no matter how you cut it, it's a direct loss that property tax owners . . . or ratepayers are going to have to pick up.

On the other hand, Madam Minister, just one further comment. You mention that the Premier has mentioned this; you've mentioned this; I think you said the Minister of Finance has mentioned it; that you're studying it. My comment to you is, I hope you don't study it to death to the point that we never see a move on it. That indeed there is a major move to fund education, as you've indicated, as your colleagues said they would do when they were in opposition, that they would fund it rather than allowing it to grow, and the shift to take place — as we've seen in the province over the last five years — from a 40/60 split of taxpayer versus the province that we had back in 1991, the shift where the province is now only paying 40 per cent instead of the 60 per cent.

So I trust, and I encourage you, Madam Minister, not just study it, but indeed make some firm actions and commitment to move on this issue. Thank you, Madam Minister.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, it becomes abundantly clear why, in 1991, we inherited from the administration of that party, a \$14 billion debt. He says, just spend the money; don't study it. Don't contemplate; don't worry about whether it's

sustainable. Just write a cheque; throw money at it. And this is the kind of voodoo economics that put us where we are. And we would be able to reach that goal of funding education to a larger degree from the treasury a lot faster if we hadn't inherited the mess of debt that we did.

Mr. Toth: — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, if you want, we can continue this all day. You talk about the debt in 1991. Madam Minister, no one is saying that there wasn't some further debt accumulated and that there was a large debt in 1991. No one is saying that it wasn't there.

But if you want me to go back, Madam Minister, I can take a fair bit of time and just show you what was there prior to . . . what the government of the '80s had to live with; what the government had to do to balance off the costs that were incurred in land bank costs because there wasn't enough revenue generated to pay the interest; the potash debt that was accumulated — the potash corporation that was built, not by the former government, but by the previous government.

Madam Minister, there are so many things that we could get into and debate here this afternoon — I'm not going to take the time to do it. But I would suggest that if you want to get into that, you can certainly get up and just give me more fuel and more ammunition to work with. I'd be more than pleased to do that.

All I'm asking you right now, Madam Minister, is to put into action some of the comments that you have made regarding reducing the cost to property tax owners of the area of responsibility of the province of Saskatchewan and the Government of Saskatchewan should have. Thank you.

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Chairman, we have said that that is our goal and we will plan, carefully, towards that goal, Mr. Speaker.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clauses 2 to 13 inclusive agreed to.

The committee agreed to report the Bill.

THIRD READINGS

Bill No. 68 — The Saskatchewan Gaming Corporation Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read for the third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

Bill No. 57 — The Municipal Revenue Sharing Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Mrs. Teichrob: — Mr. Speaker, I move that this Bill be now read the third time and passed under its title.

Motion agreed to, the Bill read a third time and passed under its title.

The Assembly recessed until 1:30 p.m.

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